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SUBJECT: PORTRAIT OF VICE PRESIDENT XI JINPING: "AMBITIOUS
SURVIVOR" OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.
4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) According to a well connected Embassy contact, Politburo Standing Committee Member and Vice President Xi Jinping is "exceptionally ambitious," confident and focused, and has had his "eye on the prize" from early adulthood. Unlike many youth who "made up for lost time by having fun" after the Cultural Revolution, Xi "chose to survive by becoming redder than the red." He joined the Party and began mapping out a career plan that would take him to the top of the system. In our contact's view, Xi is supremely pragmatic and a realist, driven not by ideology but by a combination of ambition and "self-protection." Xi is a true "elitist" at heart, according to our contact, believing that rule by a dedicated and committed Communist Party leadership is the key to enduring social stability and national strength. The most permanent influences shaping Xi's worldview were his "princeling" pedigree and formative years growing up with families of first-generation CCP revolutionaries in Beijing's exclusive residential compounds. Our contact is convinced that Xi has a genuine sense of "entitlement," believing that members of his generation are the "legitimate heirs" to the revolutionary achievements of their parents and therefore "deserve to rule China."

¶2. (C) Xi is not corrupt and does not care about money, but could be "corrupted by power," in our contact's view. Xi at one point early in his career was quite taken with Buddhist mysticism, displaying a fascination with (and knowledge of) Buddhist martial arts and mystical powers said to aid health. The contact stated that Xi is very familiar with the West, including the United States, and has a favorable outlook toward the United States. He also understands Taiwan and the Taiwan people from his long tenure as an official in Fujian Province. End Summary.

Introduction

¶3. (C) A longtime Embassy contact and former close friend of Politburo Standing Committee Member and Vice President Xi Jinping has shared with PolOff his first-hand knowledge of Xi's family background, upbringing, early adulthood, and political career, as well as his impressions and assessments of Xi's personality and political views. The information was acquired in multiple conversations over a two-year period 2007-2009. The contact is an American citizen of Chinese descent who teaches political science at XXXXXXXXXXXX "

Fifteen-Year Relationship with Xi

¶4. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX and Xi Jinping were both born in 1953 and grew up in similar circumstances. According to the professor, they lived with other sons and

daughters of China's first-generation revolutionaries in the senior leaders' compounds in Beijing and were groomed to become China's ruling elite. The professor did not know Xi personally until they had both reached their late teens, when the professor began to hear about Xi from the professor's best friend, XXXXXXXXXXXX, who was later sent to the same village as Xi in Shaanxi province during the Cultural Revolution. (Note: According to the professor, Zhou Sanhua's father was a former editor-in-chief of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Daily.) By the time the professor and Xi had returned separately from the countryside, they had come to know each other personally, initially through Zhou Sanhua's introduction, and maintained a relationship for the next 15 years (ca. 1972 to 1987), even though their lives and careers took markedly different paths.

Revolutionary Fathers

15. (C) Xi's father, Xi Zhongxun, was a communist guerilla leader in northwest China in the 1930s, when Mao and the CCP leaders reached Yan'an at the end of the Long March. Xi Zhongxun was one of the few local leaders to survive later purges, siding with the Mao Zedong faction and rising quickly through Party ranks to become a Vice Premier in the 1950s while still in his thirties. According to the professor, Xi Zhongxun was the youngest Vice Premier among the early generation of CCP leaders. Despite his association with Mao's group, said the professor, Xi Zhongxun was also "good friends" with Deng Xiaoping and was "actually closer to Deng than to Mao."

BEIJING 00003128 002 OF 006

16. (C) The professor's father was also an early revolutionary and contemporary of Mao, from a neighboring county to Mao's in Hunan province. The professor's father participated in the revolution periodically but also spent time in Japan and Hong Kong, distinguishing himself as a labor leader. In 1949, according to the professor, his father agreed to return to Beijing at Mao's insistence and became the PRC's first Minister of Labor and a member of the first Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Standing Committee.

17. (C) Despite Communist Party rhetoric regarding the creation of a "classless" society, the professor described, the pre-Cultural Revolution society and leadership compounds in which he and Xi Jinping grew up were, ironically, the "most precisely class-based mini-society ever constructed." Everything was determined by one's "internal party class status," the professor asserted, including the kindergarten one attended, the place where one shopped, and the type of car one could own. All of these "benefits" were determined by Party rank, such as Politburo Standing Committee member, Vice Minister, or Central Committee member. One's every action, every day, was in some way an indication of one's "class" status, the professor stated. The children of this revolutionary elite were told that they, too, would someday take their rightful place in the Chinese leadership. All of this came to an end in the Cultural Revolution, the professor said, but consciousness of membership in an entitled, elite generation of future rulers has remained among most of the members of this class.

Cultural Revolution and Return to Beijing

18. (C) Both Xi Zhongxun and the professor's father were purged during the Cultural Revolution and spent time in prison, according to the professor. (Note: Xi Zhongxun was purged in the early 1960s, several years before the Cultural Revolution began, but things got worse for him and his family once the Cultural Revolution started.) The professor's father was falsely accused of supporting Liu Shaoqi and spent most of the Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976) in prison. Both Xi Zhongxun and the professor's father were later

rehabilitated when Deng Xiaoping returned to power. Xi was rehabilitated by Deng in 1978 and was appointed by Deng as Party Secretary in Guangdong in the 1980s.

¶9. (C) In the early 1970s, the circle of youthful friends, including Xi Jinping and the professor, managed to return to Beijing from the countryside. The professor described themselves as "fugitives" of one kind or another. The professor himself served prison time and spent "years on the run" due to his father's status as a "counter-revolutionary." At this time, the professor said, he knew Xi, but they did not spend a great deal of time together.

¶10. (C) The professor said that he and others found dramatically different ways to "survive" the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. While the professor and his closest circle of friends descended into the pursuit of romantic relationships, drink, movies and Western literature as a release from the hardships of the time, Xi Jinping, by contrast "chose to survive by becoming redder than the red." (Note: The professor commented that, in a continuation of his attempt to deal with the Cultural Revolution, the professor eventually decided to "flee" China and pursue graduate study -- and a new life -- in the United States.) Unlike the professor and others who shared his Cultural Revolution experience in rural villages, Xi turned to serious politics upon his return to Beijing, joining the CCP in 1974 while his father was still in prison. The professor and his friends were reading DeGaulle and Nixon and "trying to catch up for lost years by having fun," while Xi was reading Marx and laying the foundation for a career in politics. Xi even went off to join a "worker-peasant-soldier revolutionary committee" (note: a label given provincial governing units during the Cultural Revolution), after which the professor had presumed he would never see Xi again. It was an "open secret," the professor said, that it was through the "worker-peasant-soldier revolutionary committee" that Xi got his "bachelor's education." The professor said Xi's first degree was not a "real" university education, but instead a three-year degree in applied Marxism. (Note: Xi's official biography provides no information on Xi between his assignment to Yanchuan county, Shaanxi province, in 1969, and 1975, when, it states, he became a student at Tsinghua University, graduating in 1979.)

Neighbors, 1977-1982

BEIJING 00003128 003 OF 006

¶11. (C) When Xi and the professor's fathers were rehabilitated following the Cultural Revolution, the professor said, their respective families were relocated to the "Nanshagou" housing compound in western Beijing, directly across from Diaoyutai. The professor opened his Nanshagou apartment door one day in 1977 and there was Xi, standing across the hall from him. The two friends lived directly across from one another and, the professor said, talked almost daily for the next five years. Xi became a PLA officer "and wore his uniform every day," while the professor became a student at Beijing Shifan Daxue (Beijing Normal University). There were many prominent leaders in Nanshagou, including Wang Daohan, Jiang Zemin's mentor. Jiang frequently rode his bike there, and Jia Qinglin (currently Politburo Standing Committee member) also had a connection to Wang from that time, the professor said.

Sporadic Contact, 1982-1987

¶12. (C) From 1982 to 1987, the professor only saw Xi periodically, most memorably during a visit to Xiamen in the mid-1980s, where Xi was serving as a local official, and in 1987 when Xi visited the professor in Washington, D.C. In Xiamen, Xi treated the professor like royalty, but they did not spend much time together during the professor's visit

there, and Xi said very little of substance. The professor, in turn, hosted Xi in Washington, D.C., where the professor was a graduate student. Xi's 1987 visit to the United States was the last time the two men met face to face. The last time the professor spoke with Xi was when his father, Xi Zhongxun, passed away several years ago, at which time the two spoke briefly over the phone when the professor called to offer his condolences. Xi was serving as the Party Secretary of Zhejiang Province at the time.

Xi's Family

¶13. (C) Xi was the middle child in a family of three children that included an older sister and a younger brother, all of whom were apparently from his father's second marriage, according to the professor. Xi's older sister, Xi An'an, at some point left China for Canada, and as far as the professor knows, still resides there. Xi An'an's husband was in the PLA, the professor said. Xi's younger brother, Xi Yuanping, moved to Hong Kong when it was under British rule. The last time the professor saw Xi Yuanping was in the 1980s, at a time when Xi's father Xi Zhongxun was still Party Secretary in Guangdong province. The brother had become both obese and very wealthy, the professor said, sporting "expensive jewelry and designer clothing." The professor has lost contact with him since. (Note: Unofficial biographies published in Hong Kong claim Xi had other siblings as well.)

Marriage and Divorce

¶14. (C) Xi Jinping's first marriage was to Ke Xiaoming, the daughter of China's 1978-1983 ambassador to Great Britain, Ke Hua. According to the professor, Ke Xiaoming was elegant and well educated. The couple initially lived with Xi's parents in the Nanshaogou housing compound, but as his father's political fortunes rose, his parents moved to a new house in "East" Beijing, near the Drum Tower and close to the houses of Deng Xiaoping and Yang Shangkun, leaving the young couple to themselves in the Nanshaogou apartment. The couple fought "almost every day," the professor said, and the marriage ended when Ke Xiaoming returned to England and Xi refused to go with her. The professor remarked that he thought Xi's "distant" quality contributed to the couple's divorce. He noted that he had watched Xi "drift" further and further from Ke Xiaoming, until she finally left for England. There was, "of course," no way that Xi would go with her, the professor said. Xi later married a famous PLA singer.

Xi's Early Career: Single-Minded Pursuit of Power

¶15. (C) According to the professor, Xi was always "exceptionally ambitious" and had his "eye on the prize" from the very beginning. Once Xi had returned from his education in the worker-soldier-peasant revolutionary committee, he carefully laid out a career plan that would maximize his opportunities to rise to the top levels of the Party hierarchy, first becoming a PLA officer in the late 1970s and then serving in a variety of provincial leadership positions, progressively rising through the ranks. By 1979, Xi was on the staffs of the State Council and the Central Military Commission (CMC), serving as an assistant to the CMC Secretary General and later Minister of National Defense

BEIJING 00003128 004 OF 006

(1982), General Geng Biao, a revolutionary comrade of his father's. The professor said he had the impression that Geng Biao had helped Xi Jinping get the PLA job, and that Xi Zhongxun had, in turn, given Geng's daughter a position in Guangdong when he was Party Secretary there.

¶16. (C) According to the professor, Xi subsequently became even more serious in plotting a career path to the top. By all appearances, with his father having been politically

rehabilitated and rapidly regaining his power, Xi Jinping could have continued to rise quickly in the Central Party apparatus. Xi, however, reasoned that in the long run, staying in Beijing would limit his career potential. Xi told the professor that staying with Geng Biao would eventually shrink his power base, which would ultimately rest primarily on his father's and Geng's networks and political support. Moreover, in time, people would turn against him if he stayed in the Center.

¶17. (C) So in a calculated move to lay the basis for a future return as a Central leader, Xi asked for a position in the countryside and, in 1982, became a local official in Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province. Xi later became the Deputy Party Secretary in Zhengding county, also in Hebei. Xi told the professor at the time that he "would be back one day." (Note: Xi later served for many years in Fujian province, becoming Governor in 2000, then moving to Zhejiang province in 2002 to be Party Secretary, and then to Shanghai as Party Secretary in 2007. He was elevated to the Politburo Standing Committee at the 17th National CCP Congress in October 2007 and was appointed Vice President at the National People's Congress in March 2008.)

¶18. (C) Xi told the professor at the time that going to the provinces was his "only path to central power." Xi thought it was important to know people in the Central Organization Department and to keep his eyes on the Center, even as he worked his way up the ladder as a local official. According to the professor, Xi "had promotion to the Center in mind from day one." Xi knew how to develop personal networks and work the system, first using his father's networks and later building his own.

Xi the Person

¶19. (C) The professor offered his personal assessment -- based on their similar upbringing and his long association with Xi during his formative years -- of Xi's personality and political views. Although he had not seen Xi in person in more than 20 years, "one cannot entirely escape one's past," he asserted, and "Xi does not want to." The professor on repeated occasions painted a portrait of Xi Jinping as an ambitious, calculating, confident and focused person who in early adulthood demonstrated his singleness of purpose by distinguishing himself from his peers and turning his attention to politics even before the Cultural Revolution had concluded. The professor marveled that Xi joined the Communist Party while his father still languished in a Party prison for alleged political crimes. At the time, the professor and his friend Zhou felt "betrayed" by Xi's embrace of the CCP, but both realized this was one way to "survive." Xi chose to "join the system" to get ahead. Although Xi never said so explicitly, he sent a message that, in China, there was a better way forward than what the professor had chosen: namely, do not give up on the system. Xi was reserved and detached and "difficult to read," said the professor. He had a "strong mind" and understood power, but "from day one, never showed his hand."

¶20. (C) Unlike those in the social circles the professor ran in, Xi Jinping could not talk about women and movies and did not drink or do drugs. Xi was considered of only average intelligence, the professor said, and not as smart as the professor's peer group. Women thought Xi was "boring." The professor never felt completely relaxed around Xi, who seemed extremely "driven." Nevertheless, despite Xi's lack of popularity in the conventional sense and his "cold and calculating" demeanor in these early years, the professor said, Xi was "not cold-hearted." He was still considered a "good guy" in other ways. Xi was outwardly friendly, "always knew the answers" to questions, and would "always take care of you." The professor surmised that Xi's newfound popularity today, which the professor found surprising, must stem in part from Xi's being "generous and loyal." Xi also does not care at all about money and is not corrupt, the professor stated. Xi can afford to be incorruptible, the

professor wryly noted, given that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. It is likely that Xi could, however, be "corrupted by power."

BEIJING 00003128 005 OF 006

Xi's Political Instincts and Biases

¶21. (C) In the professor's view, Xi Jinping is supremely pragmatic, a realist, driven not by ideology but by a combination of ambition and "self-protection." The professor saw Xi's early calculations to carefully lay out a realistic career path as an illustration of his pragmatism. The most permanent influences shaping Xi's worldview were his princeling pedigree and formative years growing up with families of first-generation CCP revolutionaries in Beijing's elite residential compounds. These influences were amplified by Xi's decision in his early twenties to join the CCP and then the PLA. Xi solidified these views and values during his subsequent very successful 30-year career as a Party official, the professor concluded.

¶22. (C) Xi is a true "elitist" at heart, according to the professor, and believes that rule by a dedicated and committed Communist Party leadership is the key to enduring social stability and national strength, as in the (self-perceived) elite-dominated society of his youth, knit together by family ties, elders and male authority. After years of conversations with Xi, and having shared a common upbringing with him, the professor said, he is convinced that Xi has a genuine sense of "entitlement," believing that members of his generation are the "legitimate heirs" to the revolutionary achievements of their parents and therefore "deserve to rule China." For this reason, the professor maintained, Xi could never be a "true member" of current President Hu Jintao's camp, even if Xi did not give any indication of opposition to Hu Jintao now. Xi and other first-generation princelings derisively refer to people with non-Party, non-elite, commercial backgrounds like Hu Jintao as "shopkeepers' sons," whose parents did not fight and die for the revolution and therefore do not deserve positions of power.

¶23. (C) Xi knows how very corrupt China is and is repulsed by the all-encompassing commercialization of Chinese society, with its attendant nouveau riche, official corruption, loss of values, dignity, and self-respect, and such "moral evils" as drugs and prostitution, the professor stated. The professor speculated that if Xi were to become the Party General Secretary, he would likely aggressively attempt to address these evils, perhaps at the expense of the new moneyed class.

¶24. (C) Xi at one point early in his career was quite taken with Buddhist mysticism, according to the professor. In comments Xi made to the professor, including during the professor's visit to Xiamen while Xi was serving as an official there, Xi displayed a fascination with Buddhist martial arts, qigong, and other mystical powers said to aid health, as well as with Buddhist sacred sites such as Wutaishan. The professor said he does not know whether Xi was actually religious, or whether he was simply looking for a way to aid his health and well-being. Regardless, the professor said, he was extremely surprised by how much Xi knew about the subject and Xi's seeming belief in supernatural forces.

Familiarity with the West and Taiwan

¶25. (C) Based on personal experience, the professor noted, Xi is very familiar with the West, with a sister in Canada, an ex-wife in England, a brother in Hong Kong, many friends overseas, and prior travel to the United States. As far as the professor can discern, Xi's family and friends have had a

good experience in the West. The professor contrasted Xi's experience and attitudes toward the West with those of people sent to the United States by their work units, such as the nationalist and sometime anti-U.S. Tsinghua University scholar Yan Xuetong. Xi was the only one of his immediate family to stay behind in China, the professor noted, speculating that Xi knew early on that he would "not be special" outside of China.

¶26. (C) Xi is favorably disposed toward the United States, the professor maintained, and would want to maintain good relations with Washington. The professor said Xi has "no ambition" to "confront" the United States. During Xi's visit to Washington, D.C., in 1987, he told the professor that he had no strong impressions of the United States. Although Xi was not particularly impressed by the United States, he had nothing bad to say about it either. Xi took a detached stance, as if observing from a distance, viewing what he saw as just a normal part of life, not strange, the professor said.

BEIJING 00003128 006 OF 006

¶27. (C) Xi also knows Taiwan and the Taiwan people very well, the professor said, noting that Xi was in Fujian province for more than twenty years. Attracting Taiwan investment to Fujian was an important part of his accomplishments as a Xiamen official.

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